

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Office of Inspector General



**PUBLIC
RELEASE**

***NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
STANDARDS AND TECHNOLOGY***

***NIST FY 1997 Superfund Charges to
the Environmental Protection Agency***

Final Audit Report No. EDD-10268-8-0001 / February 1998

Office of Audits, Economic Development Audits Division





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
The Inspector General
Washington, D.C. 20230

February 16, 1998

MEMORANDUM FOR: John C. McGuffin
Controller
National Institute of Standards
and Technology

FROM: Andrew R. Cochran
Director, Economic Development Audits Division
Office of Audits

SUBJECT: NIST FY 1997 Superfund Charges to
the Environmental Protection Agency
Final Report No. EDD-10268-8-0001

The Office of Inspector General has completed its audit of NIST's use of EPA Superfund appropriations and prepared the final audit report. The audit was completed to fulfill the requirement under the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 for an annual audit of all Superfund payments and obligations.

We found that NIST had accurately accumulated, documented and charged the Superfund reimbursable costs for the funds received. The funds were received in advance for all the work performed by NIST. Our evaluation indicated that NIST was in compliance with the relevant financial provisions of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980, as amended.

NIST also was in compliance with the terms and conditions of the interagency agreement, and controls over Superfund activities were adequate. During fiscal year 1997 NIST properly tracked EPA Superfund monies by providing segregated cost centers for the Superfund expenditures. As a result, we are issuing this report in final form with no recommendations for future action by NIST.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies extended to us by NIST officials during the audit.

Introduction

Among its many efforts to contribute to public health and safety, NIST provides technical research to counteract the effects of toxic waste spills. This work is performed on a reimbursable basis through interagency agreements with the EPA. Funds for the agreements are appropriated through the Hazardous Substance Response Trust Fund, more commonly referred to as the “Superfund.” The Superfund is used to identify the nation’s uncontrolled hazardous waste sites, assign priorities to the risks they create and work to eliminate those risks.

The Superfund program, created under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980, established the Superfund to provide funds for identifying, prioritizing, and remediating the nation’s uncontrolled hazardous waste sites. The 1980 Act, as amended by the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986, provides for full recovery from responsible parties of all response costs incurred by the Federal Government. Response costs generally include expenses for investigations, cleanup, enforcement, and administrative activities.

The 1986 Act also provides that the Inspector General will conduct an annual audit of all payments, obligations, reimbursements, or other uses of the Superfund to assure that the fund is being properly administered.

Purpose and Scope of Audit

The purpose of our audit was to determine whether NIST had properly managed the financial aspects of its Superfund interagency agreements. We evaluated whether NIST had (1) accurately accumulated, documented and charged EPA for the Superfund reimbursable costs; (2) established adequate internal controls over reimbursable work related to the interagency agreement; and (3) complied with the terms and conditions of its Superfund interagency agreement with EPA. Our review covered interagency agreements entered into or continuing between EPA and NIST during the period October 1, 1996 through September 30, 1997.

We reviewed NIST’s policies and procedures for identifying and assigning actual costs to the project and recovering all eligible costs. We also interviewed NIST’s administrative personnel. Our review was conducted at NIST offices in Gaithersburg, Maryland in November 1997.

To confirm direct costs, we reviewed the agency’s financial and program records as well as EPA documents and records. In reviewing indirect costs, we limited the scope of our review to performing an analytical review of indirect costs and rates charged, investigating any differences from the previous fiscal year. We found no significant unexplained differences in the indirect cost rates we compared.

Our audit included an evaluation of internal controls to the extent that they related to the administration of the Superfund interagency agreements with EPA. We relied upon the internal control reviews performed by the independent accountants for NIST for fiscal year 1997, as well as

our own review. We found reasonable assurance that there was no material weakness in the recording of the Superfund appropriations.

In our review, we relied on computer-based data obtained from NIST's Office of the Controller. We assessed the reliability of the data by tracing it to source documents and comparing it to other summary data prepared by the laboratories. We found the data sufficiently reliable to be used in meeting the audit objectives. In addition, we evaluated the agency's compliance with laws and regulations applicable to the Superfund monies. We identified the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980, as amended, as the authorizing and governing legislation. The terms and conditions of the interagency agreement were identified. The review was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards, and was performed under the authority of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and Department Organization Order 10-13, dated May 22, 1980, as amended.

Superfund Charges Accurately Accumulated, Documented and Billed

One NIST operating unit administered a single Superfund interagency agreement with EPA during fiscal year 1997. The Technology Laboratory received funding of \$300,000 during FY 1995, of which \$27,670 was unobligated at the beginning of FY 1997. The laboratory expended \$26,994 during FY 1997 under this continuing agreement.

We tested the accuracy of the accounting data by tracing it to original source documents and to the NIST/EPA entry recorded in the Working Capital Accounts. We compared the data to summary information contained in the cost center statements and other documents. All costs were confirmed to their limitation ledgers and related to the NIST Working Capital Account.

In the Technology Laboratory the data was accurately recorded from time sheets to the labor cost summaries. The NIST administration overhead charges were properly documented in the cost center. We traced the indirect costs assigned to the laboratory to the cost center report. The data recorded in the accounting records was accurate and reliable in all material respects, and reflected reasonable costs incurred for the services provided by NIST.

We determined that the costs for the interagency agreement projects were appropriately charged. Costs incurred did not exceed the specified interagency agreement obligation limits. We found that NIST properly reported the use of their Superfund funds, that all billings appeared reasonable for the work performed or the objectives anticipated, and that NIST performed in compliance with the applicable legislation. Moreover, as previously recommended by this office, all costs were accumulated in a segregated cost center for the work performed under the Superfund interagency agreement.

The following is the Superfund agreement under which funds were obligated and expenses incurred during fiscal year 1997:

**Summary of FY 1997 Obligations and Disbursements
Under Interagency Agreement DW 1393-5578-05**

Object Class	Unobligated Beginning Balance	Expended Appropriations (Cost Center 897- 3401)	Adjustment to Working Capital	Net Unobligated Balance
Personnel				
Sponsoring Division		\$10,116		
Other Division		3,812		
Fringe Benefits				
Matching Costs		2,734		
Overhead				
Applied Operating Unit		2,533		
Applied NIST		7,014		
Travel				
Domestic-Per diem		307		
Domestic-Common Carrier		333		
Domestic-Other		145		
Totals	\$27,670	\$26,994	\$676	\$0

In summary, we found that NIST properly accumulated, documented, and billed all of the Superfund work performed during fiscal year 1997 under the NIST/EPA Superfund agreement. Our findings, therefore, result in no recommendations for action by NIST.